

The Origin of Gnosticism

Heavenly man in The Gospel of Thomas

Assigning a date to this early Christian document is very difficult. Some American scholars are inclined to consider it very early. But I see no reason why the *Gospel of Thomas* should be dated much earlier than other *Nag Hammadi-writings* such as the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth*, i.e. 140-180 BC¹. The collection of Jesus-logia is obviously not a mere reproduction of an early Jesus-tradition but a careful selection of words illustrating the theme seeking and finding the Kingdom of God. This teaching about the Kingdom is “secret” teaching and to be able to enter the Kingdom you have to be a *monachos*, that is one who has united male and female nature, the inward man with the outward, the heavenly things with the earthly, changing every duality into mystic unity, thereby getting another eye (a new vision) and another hand and another foot (a new way of living and acting) log 22. Salvation is only for the chosen few: “one out of 1000, two out of 10 000, and they will be standing firm as a single one”, log 23 (the same expression is found at the end of log 16: “standing as *monachos*”). “Standing” is also the magic word in log 17: “blessed is he who will stand at the beginning, he will have knowledge of the end and he will not taste death”. I have shown in my articles about Simon Magus and

Confirmation and Mandaean Religion that “standing” is an old baptismal term going all the way back to the initiation of a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. The high priest is ritually an epiphany of the primordial king of paradise, Adam before the fall. This heavenly Adam is also called “Son of Man” (log 106: “When you make the two into one, you will become Sons of Man”) and “Man of Light”. Log 4 speaks about an old man who has to ask a 7 days old child about “the place (*topos*) of Life”. The child can be a symbol of man being reborn in baptism and free of sexual desire and shamefulness having ritually reentered Paradise, the holy place of Life. Also log 4 ends with: “and they will become a single one”. Adam before the creation of Eve was in some Jewish traditions seen as a unity of male and female, as “man created as male and female”, Gen 1. “Before Eve, there was a complete body, without division”, says Ephrem the Syrian. Originally Adam was a perfect unity of male and female, (Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian*, 1978,p.81) Adam was also acc. to Ephrem introduced into Paradise as the magnificent king over the Paradise mountain described as radiant and spreading its fragrance and healing air down into the earthly sphere (Kronholm,pp.67ff.) “The entry of Adam/man into this Paradisiacal world is considered as a formal elevation and installation in the royal

¹ Acc. to Hippolytus *adv.haer.* V,7,20 the *Gospel of Thomas* is referred to by the Gnostic sect the Naassenes. They quote the following logion no longer found in the gospel: “He that seeketh me will find me in children from seven years old and upwards: for there am I manifested, who am hidden in the fourteenth age (or aeon).” This “seeking” the “hidden” is very typical of the *Gospel of Thomas*. As stressed by Per Beskow (Gammalt evangelium blir som nytt, *Signum*,1999, nr.4) salvation acc. to this gospel is not so much found in the community of the church as by the individual’s “seeking” and “finding”. This is typical for a tendency in Syrian Christianity developing into early monasticism. This rather stern version of Christianity, where Eucharist and forgiveness of sins play no part was later the seedbed of Islam (Tor Andræ, *Der Ursprung des Islam und das Christentum*, 1926)

and priestly office as *imago dei*” (Kronholm, p.75). Cf. log 2, the man who seeks and finds will be “king over everything”.

Already in OT we find the idea that Moses has to fashion the tent-sanctuary after a heavenly model. Later the Menorah was the earthly icon of the Tree of Life and Adam was the image of God. This makes the priesthood and the choir and later the Qumran-community the earthly icon of the hosts of angels serving before the throne of God.

Early Christian theology of baptism

Behind the early Christian theology of baptism and its notion of Christ as *macr'anthropos* and the second Adam and the hope for an eschatological body of glory is the symbol of primordial man as a figure full of light and glory and with macrocosmic dimensions. This symbol of primordial man is created by mystical experience during which

- 1) One's mind departs from the body in a typical out-of-body-experience
- 2) And becomes one with the entire cosmos
- 3) This is felt as a regress to the primordial unity of the universe, to coincidentia oppositorum (“the unity of opposites”)
- 4) One's mind is filled with and totally changed into divine fire and glory.

But instead of speculating over the fall of man and his being encapsulated in a mortal body, Paul's theology is focused on salvation as being vested in Christ as the cosmic man symbolizing cosmic unity, Eph; Col 1,15-20. That this being taken into the *macr'anthropos*-symbol, which is both male and female, was a dogma in the baptismal sects, can be seen from what was taught in the sect of the Elkasaites. Elkasai has got a book from Persia (the holy Orient) and he passes it on to the *Sobai* (“baptists”). His prophetic calling happened when he met two angels (Christ and his female counterpart, the Holy Spirit) both of a height of 96 miles.

Mysticism can be defined as the experience of the unity of all. Therefore the most important proof of an early Christian mysticism is this notion of a primordial man who is the great cosmic man (Greek: *macr'anthropos*), a notion already met with in Judaism and from here taken over by the early Christian baptizers (proved by Wayne A. Meeks²) The mystical experience is interpreted as the mind's regress to the primordial state, to a shining primordial unity before everything was dissolved into duality. This is why we have this notion of Adam before the fall as light and as the unity of opposites, first and foremost the duality between male and female. Adam before falling into sin is described as androgynous or transcending sex or as the unity of 4 elements. And Christ as the second Adam can be described as the one who brings the whole cosmos into unity, Eph

² The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a symbol in earliest Christianity, *History of Religions* 13, 1974, pp.165-208. Ibid.: The Unity of Humankind in Colossians and Ephesians, in *God's Christ and His people: Essays presented to Nils Alstrup Dahl*, ed. J.Jervell and W.A.Meeks,1977, pp.209-21.

1,10, and as the one who in himself unites man and woman, slave and free, Jew and Greek.

Acc. to Gen.1,26 this Adam was God's picture and likeness and can be identified with the "figure of a man" seen by Hezekiel (Hez 1,26) as enthroned above the cherubim and the *merkabah* (the wagon like throne of God). Seeing God is seeing this "form" of God (Greek *morphē*, also mentioned Phil 2,6) a form in the likeness of a man with cosmic-astronomical dimensions. Becoming one with this figure also called "Son of Man" is met with in both *1.En* 71, by Paul Gal 3,27f.; 1.Cor 12,12f., in *3.En*, where Enoch is changed into Metatron and made as big as the whole universe, and in the collection of tracts called *Corpus Hermeticum*, where there are traces of Jewish-Christian motifs (Jewish-Christian is here used in the meaning given to the word by Jean Daniélou³ about some motifs characteristic of early Christianity, but later lost or redefined as Christianity moved away from its original milieu. Ex.: the notion of the Son of Man and the mystical motifs connected to it.) Mysticism is the best explanation for the above-mentioned motifs connected with the primordial man and primordial mind. An old baptism- and apotheosis-ritual going back to the rituals of the sacral kingship comes under the influence of the worldview of mysticism. The dogma of sacral kingship, that the king is one with the first man (or the cherub, Hez 28) in the garden of Eden, is fused together with the mystical motif of primordial man as light-*anthropos*.

³ *Théologie du Judéo-christianisme*, 1958.

Simon as the Originator of Gnosticism

Hippolytus quotes extensively from a strange writing called "Great Announcement" (*Apophasis Megalé*) and presumably authored by Simon. That this document actually is the work of the Magus himself is very much doubted by most scholars (Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums*, 1884, p.181, Adolph von Harnack, Kurt Rudolph, Karlmann Beyschlag, Gerd Lüdemann), but the authenticity is defended by Josef Frickel, *Die "Apophasis Megale" in Hippolyt's Refutatio*, 1968, J.M.A. Salle-Dabadie and Wayne A. Meeks. Acc. to Frickel the quotations are not from the original *Ap.Me.* but from an epitome. It cannot perhaps be proved that Simon is the author but it makes good sense and at least it should be ascribed to one of his disciples and it is our main source for understanding what was actually meant by Simon's paying homage to "The Standing One" (*ho hestōs*) as the "infinite power", the heavenly offshoot of *Sigē*, "silence". In Rec II,49 Simon calls this power "immense and ineffable light, whose greatness may be held to be incomprehensible" and unknown to God the creator, II,51. The immensity and its coming from silence are typical of the light seen in mystic vision but incomprehensible to normal ratio. It is acc. to Simon possible to have vision of this light if you gaze into heaven and then visualize that there is something above the heaven, beyond the world, in which there is neither heaven nor earth and where no shadow of things produces darkness, a light never succeeded by darkness: "For if the

light of this sun fills the whole world, how great do you suppose the bodiless and infinite light to be?" II,61.

It is important that Simon is said to have the power of the left hand of God, Ps-Clem *Hom* VII,2. Cf. Epiphanius *Pan* XXI: The Law is not God's but the power of the left.

Acc. to the Peratoi the right-hand power of God was "lordship of fruits" and the left-hand power "lord of fire". The kundalini snake is prominent in this Gnostic sect, Hipp Ref V,17: Here "the Son" is "Logos", "a snake" coiling up and down between the "immovable Father" and the "movable matter", receiving "powers" from the Father and by these powers giving form and quality to formless matter. Just as in India this is compared to the human brain and the spinal cord: The father is the brain, the son the cerebellum. The cerebellum imparts the powers from the Father to matter, like the seed that flows down the marrow of the spinal cord and impregnates.

But most of the proof of a Near Eastern kundalini-ideology has to be taken from iconography: The winged sun disc with two snakes hanging down, the winged caduceus, the Jao-Typhon amulets with the head of a rooster and the double snake as his feet, the much feared Medusa-head, the vision of which will change the deceased into stone, i.e. petrified matter (mystic vision as something threatening and deadly dangerous).

Acc. to Simon limitless things must be understood infinitely and can only be explained by perfect intellects i.e. only the

mystic, the gnostic by seeing the light can understand the mystic light here called "fire": This first principle, the fire, is a living thing possessing thinking (*phrónēsis*) and opinion (*gnômē*). Everything was produced by this unbegotten fire. There is hidden and revealed reality. The hidden consists of numerals and harmonies (a Neo-pythagorean motif). The fire is both visible and invisible, and from it were produced 6 roots: *Nous* and *Epinoia*, Sound and Name, Reasoning (*Logismos*) and Desire (*Enthymesis*).

"The beginning of the desire of the generation is from fire. Wherefore the desire after mutable generation is denominated to be inflamed". The "unbegotten fire" seems to be more or less identical with sexual desire. Blood being "both warm and yellow" contains this fire and is converted into seed in the man and into milk in the woman. And if this "flaming sword" is not brandished, the good tree will be destroyed and perish. And this is the (secret?) understanding of the words of John the Baptist about the tree cut down if it does not give good fruits. The Mind (*Nous*) of the universe is a male managing all things, the *Epinoia* is a female producing all things. From their *syzygia* comes "imcomprehensible air". The female principle, *Epinoia*/Earth, was residing in Helen during the age of the Trojan war. She was the lost sheep that the Father/*Nous* had to descend to earth to save and as the Father Simon finally found her as a poor slave girl, Helen, working in a brothel in Tyre. He was able to rescue her from bondage and enjoy her and his followers have to indulge in promiscuous intercourse because "all earth is

earth, and it makes no difference where any one sows, provided he sow". This is called "perfect agape" and holy of holies and sanctifying one another.

Mostly scholars have doubted these descriptions of libertine practice but a similar practice is prescribed by many modern Hindu-gurus believing in the tantric way of attaining vision by raising sexual desire to a maximum. For Simon the goal is not raising sexual tension to ecstatic heights without ejaculation but rather to attract *parhedroi*, helping spirits, and their taste for chaotic behavior.

Adolf Hilgenfeld has very convincingly shown that Simon is the first Gnostic and must be seen as the founder of the whole movement: In his teaching is found "die Grundlehre des ganzen Gnosticismus in ursprünglicher Gestalt" (the fundamental dogma of the whole movement in an early and original form): the difference between the highest God and the powers that created this visible world (*Die Ketzergeschichte*, p.175). Also another important dogma, salvation through knowledge, is already found in the teaching of Simon: This highest God and Father descended to earth to bring man salvation "through his knowledge" (*dia tēs idías epignōseōs* Hipp Philos VI,19). The fact that the Jewish elements in Gnosticism are often more prominent than the Christian shows that it has its origin in the early Jewish Christianity developing in Samaria, Palestine, Syria and Transjordan. (Both the *Gospel of*

Thomas and the *Naasener Sermon* refer to James, the half-brother of Jesus as the great guardian of the authentic holy tradition.) The libertine interpretation of the Jesus tradition in his "neue Weltreligion der Aufklärung" (Hilgenfeld.p.178) is also found with other early Gnostics, the Carpocratians, the Cainites, the Nicolaitans⁴. Simon must have had a great many followers, perhaps is Justin right when he says that most of the Samaritans believed in him. But his movement ended in catastrophe when he tried to imitate the resurrection of Jesus and was buried with the intention to return to life after 3 days but suffocated in the grave. All these things told by Irenaeus and Hippolyte (perhaps taken from a common source, acc. to Hilgenfeld Justin's *Syntagma*) bear the mark of authentic information. ("So etwas kann kein gewöhnlicher Kopf ersonnen haben", Hilgenfeld, p.184.) His followers may have called themselves Christians and they practiced a baptism with some kind of fiery illumination of the initiated ("immediately they have descended into the water, fire at once appears upon the water", Ps.Cyprian, *de rebaptismate* c.16). Simon's successor Menander also thinks that he can make his followers immortal by some baptismal ceremony. He does not identify himself with the highest God and Father but claims to be the Apostle of God. Satornilos follows in the footsteps of Simon and Menander putting *unum patrem incognitum* at the top of his system. This "unknown Father" creates "angels, archangels, powers and authorities" and the seven lowest ranging angels have created cosmos. When they had finished creating the material world an image of divine

⁴ "He affirms that Darkness was seized with a concupiscence - and, indeed, a foul and obscene one -after Light: out of this permixture it is a shame to say what fetid and unclean (combinations arose). The rest (of his tenets), too, are obscene. For he tells of certain Aeons, sons of turpitude, and of conjunctions of execrable and obscene embraces and per-mixtures, and certain yet baser outcomes of these. He teaches that there were born, moreover, daemons, and gods, and spirits seven, and other things sufficiently sacrilegious. alike and foul, which we blush to recount, and at once pass them by." Ps-Tertullian, *adv. omnes haer.* c.1,6.

light was shown to them from above but they were not able to take hold of this image, it at once returned to the world above. But the 7 angels said to each other “let us make a man after image and after likeness” Gen 1,26. And so they tried to incorporate a light beam from above into this fragile material body.

Hilgenfeld shows that this is a further development of the Simonian idea of *Ennoia* taken prisoner by the creators and being imprisoned in a human body, p.191. Also by Satornilos this results in a very tragic state of the world and therefore the great Father takes action and decides to dissolve all the angelic rulers of this world and especially the Jewish God and the demons and all the bad people who do not contain the inner spark of light. Satornilos considers himself a Christian and recognizes Jesus as the apostle of the Father and he changes the originally libertine practice of the early Gnostics into asceticism. The idea of Simon that the savior could not really suffer and belong to this world is even more characteristic of Satornilos and his “docetic” notion of Christ’s body. (Christ showed himself in a phantasmal shape.) Hilgenfeld thinks that Satornilos flourished during the reign of Hadrian (117-38). At the same time Basilides worked out his system with a cosmos created by angels one of them being the Jewish God of the Old Testament. Just as in the teaching of Simon this results in the world-creating powers constantly fighting each others, and to save those who have knowledge out of this crisis Christ is sent. Just as *Apophasis Megalē* Basilides has 6 emanations: *Pater, Nous, Logos, Fronēsis, Dynamis, Sophia*.

It seems to me that Hilgenfeld has proved that Simon is the great “arch-heretic” and that Gnosticism is initiated by his ideas. The importance of a “fire baptism” and the speculations about a cosmic tree bearing right

fruits or being subjected to fire show that the story told about Simon as being originally a disciple of John the Baptist could very well be true.

The six Simonean roots were destined to have a long afterlife in Gnosticism. We find them in Manichaeism as five intellectual faculties: *Nous, Énnoia, Phrónēsis, Enthýmēsis, Logismós*. A question is asked in *Kephalaia I*, C.Schmidt – Polotsky - Böhlig, p.95: “How does Light Nous come, this great, lofty, mighty one, and assume this little body of flesh?” - And the answer given is: Sin “chained Nous in the bones, Thinking in the sinews, Thought in the veins, Counsel in the flesh, Imagination in the skin”. (The exact translation of the 5 or 6 words given to the roots is difficult.) The same 5 are found in the *Acts of Thomas* ch.27 and in *Acta Archelai* ch.10. In Manichaeism these 5 light-elements are the armor of primordial man Ohrmizd and are called *panz amahraspandan*. In some Indo-Iranian cosmogonies the macr’anthropos is made up of 5 elements. In Iran the highgod Ahura Mazda is surrounded by 6 Amesha Spentas, who are also seen as different aspects of the high god and although they have very abstract names (Vohu Manah – Good mind, Asha – Right Order, Xshathra – Lordship, Aramati (goddess) – Moderate mind, Haurvatat – Good health, Ameretât – Immortality), are abstract aspects of the deity, they are also closely associated with different “elements”: Vohu Manah with the cattle, Asha with the fire, Xshathra with metal, Aramati with the earth, Haurvatât with water and Ameretât with the plants⁵. The first root in Simon’s system, Nous, is obviously a

⁵ Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 1965, pp.9-12; 79f.

translation of Manah and the way the 6 roots are both aspects of the divine mind and 6 elements in cosmos (Heaven and earth, sun and moon, air and water, acc. to *Apophasis M.*, Hipp ref VI,13) shows that they are an adaption of an Iranian cosmogony. Cosmos is seen as a creation of mind. In the list of the 6 roots or primordial principles we find *Fôné* “sound” and *Onoma* “name”. In several archaic cosmogonies sound, vibration or “word” are seen as the first and inner substance of the visible world. In Plutarch *de Is et Osir.* ch.47 the Amesha Spentas are given the six names *Ennoia, Alétheia, Eunomia, Sophia* (the goddess), *Ploutos* and The Creator of pleasant things. This Iranian coloring makes it very likely that also the “hidden and revealed fire” is the holy fire of Iranian Religion⁶. The 5 elements of the macroanthropos, the primordial heavenly Anthropos could also be the reason for the 5 divine virtues, Col 3,12 with the mentioning of the macroanthropos-symbol 3,15 and 3,11.

Epiphanius of Salamis brings the teaching of the Nicolaitans together with a great female power Barbelo “emitted from the Father”. Her relation to the world-creating powers is a little different from Ennoia’s because she “continually appears to the archons in some beautiful form and, through their climax and ejaculation, takes their seed to recover her power, which has been sown in various of them.” pan 25,2,4. This continued emitting of semen is an important part of the recovery of a female force situated in the 8th heaven. Cf that Nicolaus is quoted for saying: “Unless one copulates every day, he cannot have

eternal life” 25,1,5. Also Nicolaus has found part of his inspiration in the teaching of Simon and a “tantric” understanding of semen.

Simon’s strange understanding of “perfect love” sounds quite modern and may be contrasted with the faithful love of the goddess Isis. Plutarch is our main source of the myth about Isis and Osiris, but by comparing with the early Egyptian texts hinting at the myth it is possible to form some judgment about what was the original meaning of the myth: Weeping and mourning Isis wanders around asking everybody for information about her disappeared husband and travels to what for an Egyptian must be the end of the world, the Cedar mountains close to Byblos. Here the coffin with the dead body of her husband was washed ashore and a tree grew up around it and the tree was cut down and used as a pillar in the palace of the King of Byblos. Isis discovers the pillar and changed into a bird she flies sobbing and wailing around it and finally she gets hold of it and drags it along to a lonely place where she tries to get pregnant with his dead body hugging him and warming him with the heat of her own body. (In the version given by Plutarch she only puts her face upon his face and caresses him. But the king’s son who sneaks up from behind to have a look upon what she is doing is killed by an angry look from the goddess. Acc. to Plutarch Horus, the Elder, is already born, but later Harpocrates is born as the result of Osiris consorting with Isis after his death. This splitting up the offspring in two may be a later development.)

⁶ Widengren pp.31-5; 269-74.

This myth has its origin in prehistoric Lebanon as already proved by Pierre Montet⁷ and is also in its Syrian version felt behind the description of the “seeking” of Shulamite for the lost beloved one. And even behind the “weeping” and “the seeking” of the lost body of Jesus in the gardens outside Jerusalem and Mary’s attempt to hug Jesus and her readiness to carry his dead body, John 20,11-18. This is the longing of a myth fulfilled and becoming historic facts.

Acc. to Reinhold Merkelbach⁸ the loving wife, Isis’, seeking for her lost husband is the great theme from which the Hellenistic Novel with its plot of separation, travels to the end of the world and recognition develops. It is the idea of faithful love overcoming even death.

Creation as a female force falling/descending from a primordial union with a male principle is typical tantric cosmology. Our suspicion that tantric thinking is a basic part of early Gnosticism is further strengthened by the obsession with sexual symbols: in the teaching of the Gnostic Justin the highest principle, ”Good”, is identified with Priapos, a Greek phallic deity, Hipp Ref 5,26,32-5. Evil comes because of the separation of Elohim from his female partner Eden. She is half woman half snake and brings about the evil of adultery and divorce by the help of her 12 bad angels. There are good angels and bad angels, a good one is Baruch being sent to Jesus to make him proclaim the good news

about the Father Elohim and the highest principle called the Good. A bad angel is Naas having sex with both Eve and Adam but failing to seduce Jesus and therefore arranging to have him crucified. Here the snake Naas (after Hebrew *nahash*) is seen as the great instigator of evil and his committing adultery with Eve and pederasty with Adam must be seen as Justin’s condemnation of the typical left hand tantric practice. But normally the snake plays a very positive role in early Gnosticism. There is a *Naasener-sermon* and a group of Gnostics called *Ophitai* and a group of *Ophianoi* (after Greek *ophis*= “snake”). The revelation of the snake, the knowledge of good and evil, is seen as saving knowledge. The expression “knowledge as good and evil” must be interpreted as “all-encompassing knowledge”, the insight that “all is one”, the mystical union of opposites. The snake on the front page (dust-cover) of *Die Gnosis, Erster Band, Zeugnisse der Kirchenväter*, übers. Werner Foerster, 1969 is “Die Weltschlange” biting in its own tail (From a Greek manuscript in Biblioteca Nazionale Marciano, Venice). As a symbol of the union of duality the upper part is black and furry and the lower part white with scales. The diagram of the *ophianoi* described by Celsus is a drawing of 10 circles held together by a single big circle called “the soul of the universe” and “Leviathan” (Origin *contra Cels.* 6,25+35). Leviathan is depicted on this outer circle as a snake with its tail in its mouth. But as the “soul that permeates

⁷ Le Pays de Negaou et son Dieu, *SYRIA* 4, 1923, pp.181-92: In some early Egyptian texts it is prayed that some gods may prevent the deceased pharaoh from suffering the destiny of “becoming a pine in the land of Negau”, a location in the vicinity of Byblos.

⁸ *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*, 1962.

“everything”, it is also situated in the center. The diagram was used to promote the soul’s ascent through the seven heavens (cf. the seven chakras of tantra). Birger A. Pearson (*Ancient Gnosticism*, 2007, p.49) brings a picture of a Gnostic gem with Adam and Eve by the tree of knowledge with the snake coiling around the tree. And on the reverse a serpent coiling around itself and surrounded by the Zodiac. The snake from Gen 3 is also the cosmic snake, the coiled one (in Sanskrit *kundalini*, in Hebrew, Leviathan, in Ugarit *ltn*) primordial amorphous matter and therefore often seen as coiling around the primordial mountain, on the gem seen as a round knob.

Acc. to the teaching of the Ophitai, Adam and Eve, when they tasted the fruit got knowledge of “the power that is higher than everything else”, and some even say that the snake from Gen 3 is Sophia, the sunken female principle, and some say that the position of our digestion-system has the shape of a snake and proves that the hidden generating substance (*generatricem substantiam*) in man has the form of a serpent, Irenaeus, *adv.haer.* I,30,15. The kundalini-power as a sunken female power in both macrocosmos and microcosmos (man) is typically tantric. The female divinity Sophia is also called Prunikos, “the lewd one”.

The cosmogony of the Sethians has 3 primordial principles: Heavenly light above and dark water below and in between a strong

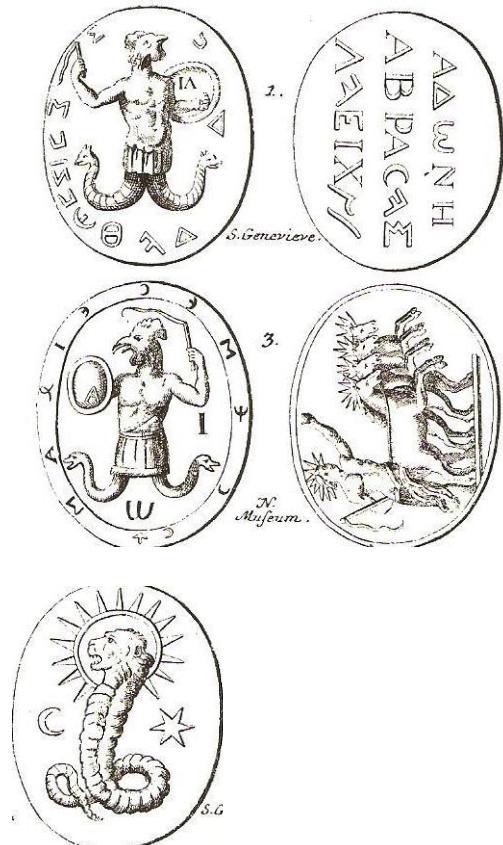
blowing wind. This wind is also a serpent and “the perfect Logos” from the light above, and creation is that this snake descends into the “womb” below. Hipp ref. V,19,18-2. Creation is the descent of snake-like power resulting in ejaculation in a cosmic womb. The dominant role of the snake in so many Gnostic systems could acc. to Wilhelm Bousset⁹ be explained as a takeover from some Phoenician snake-cult, but I hope I have proved that the archaic tantric way of thinking is a better explanation.

The Gnostic Basilides counts 365 heavens and as Lord of all the heavens a god named Abraxas. [Carl G. Jung](#) wrote a short treatise in 1916, *The Seven Sermons to the Dead*, which called Abraxas a god higher than the Christian God and devil, because he combines all opposites into one being. Several “Abraxas-gems” have survived and they show this god also called Jao as the unity of opposites: like the old symbol the winged sun-disc he is composed of two snakes as his legs and his head is the head of a rooster, i.e. he is the unity of snakes of darkness and earth and the bird of dawn and sunlight: In his hand he holds the whip of the sun god. His name is said to contain the number 365, he is not only the unity of opposites but also the totality of time (and space – the 365 heavens). He is mystical light. A similar symbol of mystical light is shown on another gem: a snake with a lion’s head being the union of sun and moon and ascending into an aureole of light. From here there is a direct line to the Mercurius of the Alchemy here shown as the unity of sun

⁹ *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, 1907,p.124 n.1.

and moon and snake and eagle (the two fighters representing earth and air) copper stitching by Basilius Valentinus¹⁰.

In tantric thinking two snakes are ascending along the spine: *Ida* from the right testicle to the left side of the cave behind the nose, *Pingala* from the left testicle to the right side of the nose. Together with the *Susumna*-channel inside the spine and the two leaves of the *Ajnacakra* they form a caduceus-like symbol. By different exercises the yogi tries to unite the life-forces running in *Ida* and *Pingala* in *Susumna*¹¹.



¹⁰ Illustrations are from Ernst T. Reimbold, Spätantike Götterbilder und –zeichen in barocker Deutung, *SYMBOLON*, Neue Folge Bd.2, 1974, pp.148-50.

¹¹ The classical work on tantra is Arthur Avalon, *The Serpent Power*, first ed. 1917. A more popular work is Benjamin Walker, *Tantrism, Tantrik cults of the left-hand path*, 1982.



In *Apophysis* cosmogony is mixed with embryology probably caused by the typical tantric parallelism between macrocosmos and microcosmos (man)¹²: From the navel of the embryo come two "channels" for the "spirit" and after surrounding the bladder from both sides they reach the pelvis and finally the "great channel", i.e. the "aorta of the spine". In this way they "pass through the side-doors" and reach the heart and make the embryo move. This strange anatomic description sounds very much like the tantric psychology: The great fire-like *shushumna* channel running along the spine and the two minor channels, *ida* and *pingala*, surrounding it, the third chakra situated in the region of the navel and a fourth situated in the region of the heart. Through the socalled "aorta of the spinal cord" the embryo receives the "substance

(Greek *ousia*) of the spirit (*pneuma*)", VI,14,8-11.

The strict parallelism between cosmos and man is also seen in Simon's interpretation of the river coming out of Eden and outside the garden dividing itself into four: This is interpreted as the four senses of the newborn (hearing is not mentioned): "The world is seen by the sight", this is the first book of the Bible, Genesis. In Exodus, after crossing the Red Sea, i.e. the blood, they came to the well with bitter water. This is knowledge about the bitterness of life. But the bitterness can be made sweet by *Logos*, the teaching of Moses in his 5 books, also symbolized by the plant used by Odysseus in his encounter with Circe, with black root and milk-white flower (the mystic union of opposites). This *Logos* is also called *epignosis*, "knowledge of all things". Leviticus is about smelling the smoke of sacrifices and smelling is about discerning, smelling the right *Logos*. Numbers is about taste and numbers, tasting "where *Logos* works". Deuteronomy is about feeling. *Logos* is the creating word making all the things that Moses said "were very good", Gen 1.

Eternal life (understood as indestructability) is in every person as a possibility but needs to

¹² There is nothing in the universe (macrocosmos), that is not also found in the human body. The creator of both macrocosmos and microcosmos is Sabda-Brahman, where "sabda" means sound...The creative force of Sabda-Brahman (the power-substance of his word is in macrocosmos) is Maka-Kundali, in microcosmos Kundalini ("the coiled")...Behind the creation stands consciousness...this aspect is also called Shiva and described as the unchanging static aspect of the great divine consciousness. The creator of the 5 elements is Shakti, the descending female side of the god. The lowest element is earth, in this last emanation the Shakti has reached its lowest level, where she is narrowed into the greatest lack of freedom, coiled up and sleeping. This aspect of Shakti is kundalini. The yogi has to wake up the sleeping snake and make it ascend during which the elements are changed back into basic sounds. Oscar Marcel Hinze, Studien zum Verständnis der archaischen Astronomie, pp.162-219, p.189-91, in *SYMBOLON*, bd.5, 1966. This short description of the universe acc. to Kundalini-Yoga has some obvious parallels to the cosmogony of Simon. During the ascension of the kundalini-snake the yogi's body becomes stiff like a dead body and cold, but when he returns to this material world his body comes alive again. This is the reason why Simon wanted to be buried for 3 days and then return to life.

be made efficient. And this is done “by standing below in the running water” and there being “made into an icon” of he, “who stands above”, 17,1, i.e. by baptism.